DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 434 325 CS 013 719

AUTHOR Siddall, Jeffery L.
TITLE America Reads: How One University Meets the Challenge.
PUB DATE 1999-10-01
NOTE 14p.
PUB TYPE Reports - Descriptive (141)
EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *College School Cooperation; *College Students; Elementary Education; Higher Education; Internship Programs; Public Schools; *Reading Improvement; *Reading Instruction; *Tutoring; Tutors; Volunteers
IDENTIFIERS *America Reads Challenge; Northeastern Illinois University; *Volunteer Teaching

ABSTRACT

This paper describes how Northeastern Illinois University employs undergraduate and graduate students as America Reads Tutors to work in the Chicago Public Schools. The paper begins with an overview of the governmental legislation, followed by a description of how the university is meeting the challenge of assisting elementary students to improve their reading. It next reports on the tutors' training workshop. Last, Craig Johnson, a Northeastern student who participated in a Minority Internship Program, chronicles his experiences hiring and coordinating employment arrangements for the America Reads Tutors. (Contains 2 figures that present an America Reads lesson planning guide and the table of contents of the tutor training manual). (NKA)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED 434 325

SCOPE OF INTEREST NOTICE
The ERIC Facility has assigned this document for processing to: CS
In our judgment, this document is also of interest to the Clearinghouses noted to the right. Indexing should reflect their special points of view. HE

America Reads: How One University Meets The Challenge

Dr. Jeffery L. Siddall
1002 Home Avenue
Oak Park, IL 60304

Home# (708)358-0864

Running Head: America Reads

Submitted: October 1, 1999

CS 013 719

J Siddall

America Reads: How One University Meets The Challenge

Reading is the foundation for all other learning. Unfortunately, many of our children are struggling through school because they have not mastered reading skills. In 1994, 40 percent of America's fourth graders failed to attain the basic level of reading and 70% of children fell below the proficient level of reading on the National Assessment of Educational Progress. In response, President Clinton announced the Administration's commitment to organizing public and private resources to help all children learn to read. The America Reads Challenge asks every American to identify what role they can play -- professionally and personally -- to help our children learn to read well and independently by the end of third grade.

Even when students receive what is perceived by educators as quality reading instruction, some will need extra time and assistance to meet strategic levels of reading ability needed in school, work, and throughout life. The fundamental purpose of the America Reads Challenge is to enable educators, parents, university students, and other community members to complement and expand existing school literacy efforts. Through after-school, summer, and weekend tutoring programs, more children can be assisted to increase their literacy skills and achievement levels (e.g., Morris, D., Shaw, B., & Perney, J.,1990).

This article describes how Northeastern Illinois University employs undergraduate and graduate students as American Reads Tutors to work in the Chicago Public Schools. It begins with an overview of the governmental legislation, followed by a description of how the University is meeting the challenge of assisting elementary students to improve their reading. Next, the tutors' training workshop conducted by Dr. Jeffery Siddall is reported. Last, Mr. Craig Johnson, a Northeastern student, who participated in a Minority Internship Program, shares his experiences hiring and coordinating employment arrangements for the America Reads Tutors.

Overview of The Legislation

On April 28, 1997, Congress introduced the Administration's America Reads Challenge Act to provide support to communities and schools in their efforts to improve local reading programs. This Act called for funding for school and community partnerships to hire reading specialists and tutor coordinators to recruit, train, and organize volunteers to tutor young children in reading.

This was the first nationwide effort to supplement classroom reading instruction with volunteer tutoring. This proposal led to a bipartisan piece of legislation which supports reading assistance in the school, the home, and the community through increased professional development of teachers in the area of reading, family literacy efforts, and community volunteer tutoring programs. The Congress and the Administration reserved $210 million for a children's reading initiative, in the 1998 budget, to be allocated to America Reads Programs.

The goal of the America Reads Challenge is to mobilize Americans across the Nation to ensure that all children can read well and independently. The legislation describes the following strategies used to accomplish these goals:

1. Create after-school, weekend, and summer learning opportunities to supplement quality classroom reading instruction.

2. Strengthen parent involvement and our nation's investment in the early childhood years so that children develop literacy abilities for learning to read by the time they enter school.

3. Bring best practices into the schools and classrooms through teachers' professional development, principals' leadership, strengthening Title I programs, and highlighting successful reading programs.

4. Promote greater public awareness and local partnership building through the formation of community-wide literacy programs.

5. Support research and evaluation in a range of critical areas related to reading and early childhood development.

Thus, the legislation has outlined strategies for improving and supplementing reading instruction, establishing supportive relationships between schools and the community, and provides funding for accomplishing these goals.

In addition, the America Reads Challenge Act allows institutions of higher education to use their Federal Work-Study funds to hire and train university students to tutor elementary children in reading. The U.S. Department of Education reports that well over 800 colleges and universities have accepted the President's challenge and have created a community tutoring program (America Reads Web Site, 1998).

The Federal Work-Study program promotes student access to college while providing practical work experience. The program assists undergraduate and graduate students by financing post-secondary education costs through part-time employment, usually in on-campus jobs. Grants are provided to approximately 3,300 institutions to pay up to 75% of the part-time salaries to Federal Work-Study students. The remaining 25% of salaries are provided by the college or other employers.

In the 1996-97 academic year, 3,298 schools participated in the Federal Work-Study program; 713,000 students received Federal Work-Study awards and the average student award was approximately $1,065 (America Reads Web Site, 1998). For Northeastern students, working in the tutoring program, the average award was $1750 per semester.

President Clinton has provided an incentive for colleges to commit to the America Reads Challenge by waiving the requirement to match 25% of the funds for Federal Work-Study students who serve as reading tutors. He has asked participating colleges and universities to pledge a substantial portion of their annual funding increase, to the placement of students in community service and training students to tutor children in reading. The government's goal is to enlist 100,000 Federal Work-Study students who will participate in the America Reads Challenge, and who will

work with teachers, families, and community organizations to provide reading assistance.

For the 1997-98 academic year, Federal Work-Study received a 35% increase in its appropriation to $830 million. The President has budgeted $900 million in Federal Work-Study funds for the 1999-2000 school year to fulfill his promise of 1 million students earning their way through college. These funds will enable universities to surpass the governmental requirement of 5% of their Federal Work-Study allocations for community service and employ more students to work for the America Reads Program (America Reads Web Site, 1998).

Northeastern Illinois University Meets the Challenge

The Office of Financial Aid, Office of the Dean of Students and a University Advisory Committee established Northeastern's America Reads Program to encourage University students to tutor children in reading and writing.

During the 1998-99 school year, Dr. Siddall became involved with the Program when Craig Johnson, an Internship student, invited him to conduct an initial training workshop and compile a resource manual for the tutors. His internship involved the facilitation of the University's America Reads Tutoring Program.

The Northeastern Illinois University students who participated in the America Reads Tutoring Program qualified to receive Federal Work-Study funds and worked with elementary students 12-20 hours a week. There were a series of application requirements and qualifications that each university student fulfilled before they were accepted as a tutor. These included: (a) enrolled full-time as an undergraduate or graduate student, (b) completed at least 45 credit hours of undergraduate university classes with a minimum grade point average of 2.50, (c) graduate students must have a minimum grade point average of 3.00, (d) completed a standard student employment application form, (e) two letters of recommendation: One which evaluated their

academic work and the other letter attested to their potential for community service, and (f) a one page essay which described their interest in being a reading tutor and why they wanted to provide this type of community service.

Based on their fulfillment of these criteria and completion of procedures, Craig Johnson invited qualified candidates for an interview. As a result of the interviews, 13 tutors were hired by the University to work at five Chicago schools. The selected students were also required to have a TB test and a background check conducted by Northeastern Illinois University's Office of Public Safety. After completing these nine requirements the tutors participated in a training workshop and received a resource manual to assist them in working with students.

Tutors' Training Workshop

The focus of the workshop was to demonstrate to tutors a basic lesson format and various methods for supporting elementary students' literacy development. During the workshop, Jeffery Siddall provided: (1) an overview about learning characteristics that warrant specific strategies and activities that are appropriate to "correct" reading problems, (2) how to determine a student's instructional reading level and select texts that match, (3) demonstrations of various activities and strategies to support comprehension, decoding, and writing development, and (4) suggestions to assist students to feel greater success and self-confidence about their reading and writing abilities.

The workshop also provided time to answer questions and concerns of the tutors and described a protocol for working in the schools and with students. The expectation was for university students to coordinate their tutoring, at all times, with the child's reading teacher. Ongoing dialogue and supervision were also provided by Craig Johnson and a university site supervisor proficient in working with children experiencing learning difficulties.

Each America Reads tutor was provided with a resource manual containing over 20 activities and strategies, including lesson planning guide and book lists. Figure 1 displays the lesson planning guide and Figure 2 is the table of contents from the resource manual.

These university reading tutors were intended to complement classroom instruction. In schools, it is often difficult for a child to receive the one-on-one instruction that can enhance their education. These work-study students worked closely with teachers, a university site supervisor, Craig Johnson, and building principals to ensure that children's tutoring needs were being met. For students exhibiting more severe learning difficulties referrals to learning specialist were recommended.

Figure 1 - America Reads Lesson Planning Guide

Date:_____ Site:_____ Student:_____
Tutor:_____ Grade:_____ Reading Level:_____
(Check and describe all areas that apply)

1. Reading a story. Title:_____

- ____Introduce the book by looking at the pictures, words, and predicting the story line.
- ____Reading to the child.
- ____Echo reading.
- ____Take turns reading the story.
- ____Child independently reads the story.
- ____Repeated reading of a story or poem.
- ____Popcorn reading.
- ____Readers' theater.
- ____Partner reading.
- ____Silent reading.
- ____Unison or choral reading.
- ____Other_____

2. Strategy or Activity to accompany the story.

- ____Use flexible strategies for figuring out words.
- ____Summarizing and predicting while reading.
- ____Comprehension through drawing.
- ____Discussing elements of the story or text.
- ____Sustained silent reading and writing.
- ____Reading to understand, reading for meaning, reading tricks strategies.
- ____Narrative pantomime.
- ____Hot spots.
- ____Other_____

3. Writing Activity

- ____Language experience approach.
- ____Child writes a sentence, selects a word to correct and practice, and generate rhyming words with similar spelling patterns.
- ____Draw a picture and write.
- ____Writing a book.
- ____Dialogue journal.
- ____Writing a poem.
- ____Other_____

OR

Word Study Activity

- ____Alphabet: sing, recite, trace, write, match letters, pictures, words.
- ____Making an ABC sound book.
- ____Picture or Word sorts.
- ____Word bank.
- ____Finding words in the story with similar spelling and phonics patterns.
- ____Other_____

4. Observations:

5. Things to consider for the next session:

Figure 2 - America Reads Tutor Resource Manual

Supporting Literacy Development

Table of Contents

Acknowledgements
Letter to tutor
American Reads Planning Guides
Book Lists

Strategies or Activities to accompany a story
Selecting instructional reading level books
Some ways to read together
How to introduce a book to young readers
Using flexible strategies for comprehension and figuring-out words
Readers' theater
Comprehension: Getting the facts
Categorizing words for K-3rd grade
Narrative pantomime
Comprehension through drawing
Sketch to stretch
Sustained silent reading and writing
Cooperative learning comprehension activity
Predict-O-Gram
Thinking aloud
Hot spots

Writing Activities
Language experience approach
Picture setting
Autobiography or biography poem
Writing a book with beginners
Writing a book: Levels 2-5

Word Study Activities
Alphabet: sing, recite, trace, write, match letters, pictures, words
Key words for beginning reading
Making an ABC sound book
Some basic rimes for word sorting and spelling
Word sorts
Labels in beginning reading
400 words used in children's writing
High frequency book words

Craig Johnson's Internship Experiences

During the second year as an America Reads Challenge institution, The Office of Financial Aid, Office of the Dean of Students and a University Advisory Committee decided to hire an intern to work 30 to 35 hours per week managing the program's day-to-day operations.

I applied and was chosen as an intern for the Northeastern Illinois University America Reads Program. As an elementary education student, I was looking for an opportunity to gain more experience in the profession. Beside the usual clinical observations and student teaching, I felt that gaining more practical experience in other areas of the profession would help me become a better teacher.

The internship began on September 8, 1998. My first task was setting up interviews with potential America Reads tutors. The Program's Advisory Committee was charged with reviewing students' transcripts, letters of recommendation, and essays. Based on the review of the credentials, students were selected for an interview with committee members.

Arranging interviews was a frustrating task for me. It seemed impossible to coordinate interview times with students and committee members. Potential tutors seemed to clamor for interview times, but had little flexibility to meet on the times available. It made me wonder how they would be accessible to serve as America Reads tutors. Finally interview times were selected on a Friday when most students were not scheduled for classes.

Five of the eight America Reads committee members, along with myself, conducted the student interviews. We asked students a variety of questions:

"Why do you want to work with children."

"What is your history in dealing with children."

"How do you think you may assist children experiencing problems in reading?"

The students' answers were based on their elementary school experiences. Many had academic problems in school, overcame these challenges, and wanted to help children with their reading difficulties. Following the interviews, candidates were selected to serve as tutors for the 1998-99 academic year.

My next internship assignment was to find placement sites for the students. During the first year of the program, Northeastern had established relationships with three Chicago Public Schools. Some of the tutors wanted to serve in their neighborhood schools or at locations convenient to the campus. Based on the needs of the students, the University was able to add two additional schools to the list of sites for the Program. Once Chicago Public School principals were contacted and the program described to them, they were receptive and eager to become part of the America Reads Challenge.

In its first year of the America Reads program, Northeastern tutors were provided with a commercially published resource manual for assisting students with literacy. However, the advisory committee felt a need to develop a more specific training workshop and manual to fit the needs of tutors and the elementary students which they worked.

During this time, I met Jeffery Siddall, an assistant professor and reading specialist, from the College of Education. I asked him to volunteer his time to develop a training workshop and resource manual to enable tutors to enter the classroom and immediately become effective tutors.

As a result, the tutors participated in a workshop with Dr. Siddall that demonstrated how to help children with a variety of literacy problems. The resource manual contained a compilation of strategies and activities that could be used by the tutor as well as the classroom teacher (Figure 2). For example, it provided children with strategies to use when they came across words they could not decode.

Each tutor was placed in a classroom and worked with individuals or small groups using materials from the workshop or followed instructions of the teacher. On-going support was provided for tutors by classroom teachers, university site supervisor, principals, and myself.

The largest hurdle facing Northeastern's America Reads Program was the recruitment of qualified candidates. Of the 202 Northeastern students who received work study awards and only fourteen met America Reads Program eligibility requirements and chose to work as tutors. A $2.00 an hour wage increase, over other work-study jobs, was provided as an incentive for students to take the America Reads Challenge.

Overall, my internship with the America Reads Program has been a challenging and rewarding experience.

Conclusions

In the simplest terms, the America Reads Challenge asks every citizen to identify activities on a personal and professional level that will help a child become an accomplished reader. Northeastern's 14 tutors provided a total of 1,200 hours of one-to-one tutoring during the fall semester (September-December). They reported observable improvements in their students' literacy abilities. Through programs of this type the challenge of helping children to improve their literacy development can become a reality.

The Clinton Administration is determined to continue making the investments in education necessary to prepare America for the 21st century. Learning to read is a critical foundation for enabling our children to learn and become successful members of our society.

Schools, universities, parents, community members and groups, can assist in

meeting the goals of the America Reads Challenge. School-wide or community reading program can be created to work with students in school and during the summer months. To learn more about the America Reads Challenge and receive a free copy of "Simple things you can do to help a child read well and independently" call 1-800-USA-LEARN, or log-on to the internet site:

http://www.ed.gov/inits/americareads/readwnow.html

References

Morris, D., Shaw, B., & Perney, J. (1990). Helping low readers in Grades 2 and 3: An after-school volunteer tutoring program. *Elementary School Journal, 91,* 133-150.

National Assessment of Educational Progress Web site (1998). http://nces.ed.gov/naep/

The U.S. Department of Education America Reads Challenge Web sites (1998). http://www.ed.gov/inits/americareads

Acknowledgements

A special thank you and words of appreciation to Northeastern's Committee of America Reads Challenge who contribute their time, talents, and resources to support this program. Finally, acknowledgements to the tutors and teachers of Chicago Public Schools who provide the invaluable resource of assisting children to develop the gift of literacy.